

# The Politics of Fairyland

Fairyland, we are told, is a monarchy and all of its people are “Lords and Ladies”. They have no commoners unless you count human beings as part of the same political system.

There isn't any form of democracy in fairyland. Oberon and Titania are absolute rulers of the hidden nation. We must assume that they are deriving their power from perhaps that other monarchy “The Gods”.

The fairy folk are differentiated from the Gods by function. The function of the Gods is to rule over specific pieces of the universe. There is a god of the oceans, a god of the forests, a god of the mountains, a god of the sun, a god of the moon and gods for every bit of the heavens and the Earth, the subterranean depths and for every part of human life, birth, death, knowledge, food, drink, the harvest, marriage, warfare, love and peace.

The fairy folk are different. They do not rule over any part of human life. They do not need to. They have their own world hidden betwixt and between the cowslips and the daisies, in the spaces of the mind and of fancy. Their realm is the whimsy of the third path, the twisty track, the way which is neither one thing nor t'other. Their power is to challenge the imagination and to keep the world open to quaint, the queer, the jolly, the illogical and the unexpected.

The existence of a parliament of the wee folk would suggest that we were bringing them down to earth with a bump and making them behave scientifically. That could never never be. For they would scorn it and wreck it and pull it down.

They are a gang. But they are the type of gang which gives itself airs and graces and takes the form of ceremony and regal pomp.

Their love of liminal spaces is appropriate to their role of sending. There are forces within the magical world which send. Powers which transport. When we are sent to heaven, sent to hell, sent to sleep, sent on a quest, sent crazy by the music, sent home, sent to work the power which points the way and pushes us thither is a mystery to us. Often it will be some little thing such as a mistake or a misunderstanding, perhaps a wrong turning in the road.

Every thing is seen as a ritual, a dance of precise movements having meaning. To say or do the wrong thing, to make the wrong movement or step could have severe consequences.

Characters like fairies or mysterious strangers or phantom old women may be shape changers but they are agents of misrule. The fairies in stories function as vectors which may bless or curse or charm.

The ordinary people in fairy stories usually inhabit a rural community which has no direct political power to change things. They live in mock ups of the old Holy Roman Empire or the Chinese Empire or fictional equivalent of these worlds. Their social order is feudal or barely post-feudal in which they are dependent upon a local Lord or Baron or similar agent of the

distant king. The key thing in all of these stories is that the power is somewhere else. The power doesn't belong to the human population but is held by God or The Gods or the tiny wee folk or the man in the high castle or some other symbol of distant power.

The Gormenghast Trilogy by Mervyn Peake is fascinating. He sets up an oligarchy which can easily lose its hereditary power. All it takes is one clever wee chap to be in the wrong place at the perfect time and the world can be turned upside down.

Mervyn Peake and Hans Christian Andersen have something in common. They both wrote in the aftermath of the collapse of fairyland as the scientists and the democrats were at the door.

The pure fairy story has nothing in it about human rights. Power is always someone else's and if one of us mere mortals were to get hold of a bit of power we would almost inevitably bring about our own demise by foolish misuse.

On the odd occasion, now and again, a human character might not abuse the power and so can be allowed to live happily ever after but this usually requires them to be raised to the aristocracy, thus becoming the power which is still distanced from the masses.

The best example of a social revolution in a kind of fairyland is Orwell's "Animal Farm". Talking animals are magical and therefore represent a type of fairy or psychopomp being who sends. In Orwell's book they are also very obvious metaphors for human political mistakes.

Fairyland falls.

The democracy activists storm the magic castle.

Power to the people!

What happens then?

In the Twentieth Century when all fairy stories seemed old hat suddenly popular literature became filled with people of power. Superheroes, super villains, mutants, inhumans or metagene carriers whose latent power is activated by some accident such as a chemical spillage or a spider bite. Multum in Parvo. I suggest looking at "The Uses of Enchantment" by Bruno Bettelheim for more information on the power of mistakes and tiny creatures in folk tales. Also perhaps cross-reference Sigmund Freud on Parapraxis.

So now we have stories about the democratisation of power. The redistribution of fairy magic to be shared by ordinary working people. As a side discussion I suppose we should look at the transitional stage where the power is given, not to the working class but to millionaire industrialists and arms manufacturers like Tony Stark and Bruce Wayne. That does seem to be a half step between kings and peasants and it matches the transition in fine art from portraits of kings to portraits of Dutch capitalists to portraits of ordinary citizens such as those painted by Norman Rockwell.

In the words of Stan Lee and other writers of Spider-Man "With great power comes great responsibility". And the stories continue to dissect the human drama of good versus evil and the soul tormenting choices which must be made when we, at last, have the power to really do something and change things.

So, at last we have conquered fairyland? Maybe not.

There are still monarchies with ritual and crown jewels. There are still oligarchies and mafia families and rich businessmen buying themselves into position of greater and greater power. When the big man says he wants to make Xyz-whatevercountryithappenstobe-land great again you know that what he means is that he wants to make himself greater again.

Beware of Napoleon Pig.